



# Research Highlights

From the Survey Research Laboratory at  
Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Public Policy

No. 4

September 1996

*Research conducted for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee*

## Virginia's African-Americans, Hispanics and Whites Differ on Responses to HIV/AIDS

White residents of Virginia tend to be most knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. Hispanics and African-Americans in Virginia are more likely than whites to support a strong government role in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

These were among the findings of telephone surveys conducted in 1995 that allow comparisons of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors concerning HIV and AIDS among major racial/ethnic groups in Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

The surveys were conducted by the Survey Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University as part of its ongoing collaboration with the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee. The Committee requested the study with the understanding that, when designing prevention and education programs, it is important to take into account differences in knowledge and attitudes among racial and ethnic groups.

### Methodology

A-survey conducted January 19 through March 22, 1995 obtained interviews with 1,542 randomly selected adult residents of Virginia, including 365 African-Americans. In addition, a sample of 492

Hispanic residents of Northern Virginia and Newport News (from U.S. Census tracts with the highest rates of Hispanic residence) was interviewed between April 8 and June 11, 1995, repeating many of the same questions used in the earlier general statewide survey.

Combined, the two surveys allow comparisons among the state's white, African-American and Hispanic populations on knowledge, behaviors and attitudes important to understanding AIDS in Virginia.

The data have been weighted on region, education and sex to create representative samples. All percentages presented in this report are weighted.

### Awareness of HIV/AIDS

While nearly all members of the three groups have heard of HIV and AIDS, the Hispanic group is the least likely to be aware that HIV and AIDS are different. Of the Hispanic sample, 51 percent were aware of this difference, compared to 63 percent of the African-Americans and 74 percent of the white sample.

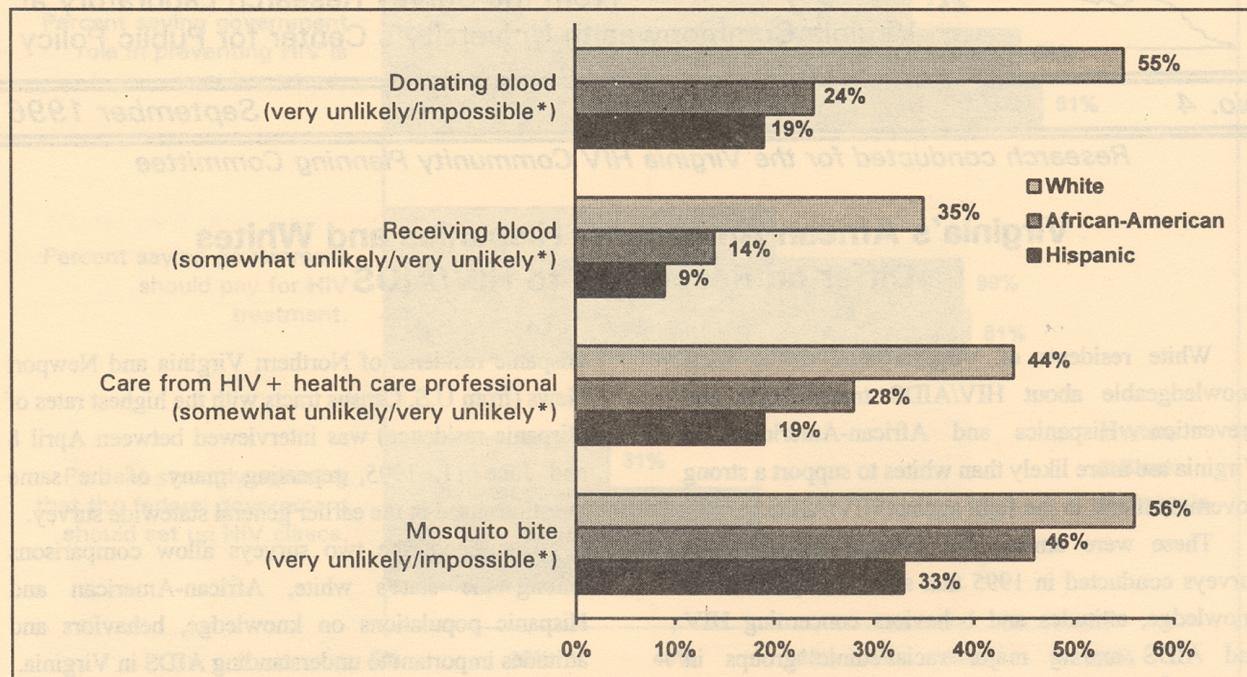
### HIV transmission and prevention

Respondents were asked to assess the likelihood of transmission of HIV in nine situations and the effectiveness of five proposed prevention methods, and their answers were compared to answers deemed correct by VCU's HIV/AIDS center. Knowledge of HIV transmission and prevention was highly related to education and income for all three groups. Those with higher education and income were more likely to give correct responses. In addition, for the Hispanic respondents, those who speak English with family or friends were also more likely to answer correctly.

<sup>1</sup> The complete text and tables are found in "HIV-Related Knowledge, Attitudes and Behavior of Virginians: 1995 General Population Sample," September 1995; and "HIV-Related Knowledge, Attitudes and Behavior of Virginians: 1995 Sample of Hispanics," February 1996. Both reports were prepared by the VCU Survey Research Laboratory for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee, and are available from the SRL.



**Figure 1: Percent answering correctly about the likelihood of transmission in four situations.** "Correct" is interpreted liberally here, to include best and next-best responses, which are noted in parentheses below. Best responses, supplied by VCU's HIV/AIDS Center, are marked with an asterisk.



Almost all respondents in all samples knew sharing a needle for drug use with an HIV-infected person is very likely to transmit the virus, and most knew HIV cannot be spread through casual contact such as a handshake. Respondents were less knowledgeable about transmission in other situations,

however, and tended to overstate the risks in situations in which transmission is highly unlikely or impossible. On these questions, Hispanic and African-American respondents had a stronger tendency to overstate the risks than did white respondents.

Figure 1 shows comparisons among the three samples in responses to questions about the likelihood of transmission in four situations. It shows, for example, that 55 percent of the white sample answered correctly that it is impossible to contract HIV by donating blood, or gave the next-best response, "highly unlikely," as compared to 24 percent of African-American and 19 percent of Hispanic respondents.

Most members of the three groups were aware of the effectiveness of condoms in preventing the spread of HIV, and most were unsure as to the effectiveness of diaphragms and spermicidal jellies. However, the three groups differed in their perceptions of the efficacy of birth control pills and withdrawal of the penis before ejaculation.

Figure 2 shows that 92 percent of whites, 80 percent of African-Americans and 72 percent of Hispanics said, correctly, that birth control pills are not

#### **The SRL and the HCPC**

The Virginia Commonwealth University Survey Research Laboratory, founded in 1982, and incorporated in the university's Center for Public Policy in 1994, serves the university, the community, and local and state government through some 100 projects annually. The SRL also manages a number of large data sets available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.

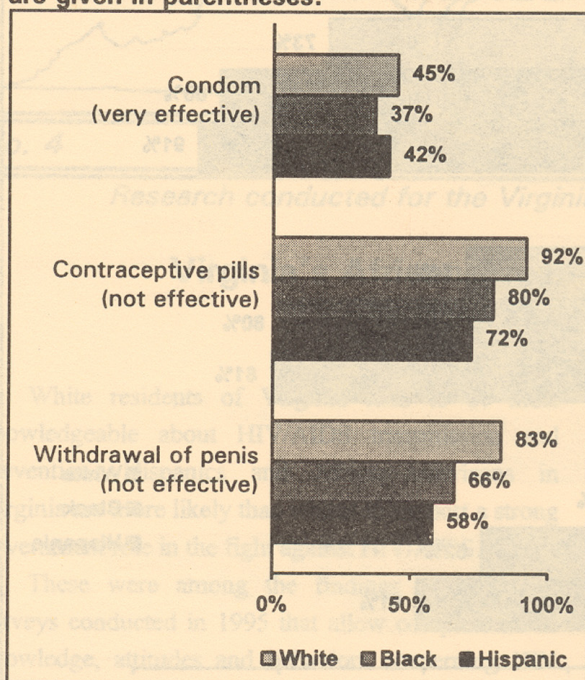
The SRL conducted the survey discussed in this report for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee (HCPC), an advisory committee to the Virginia Department of Health. The HCPC includes representatives from public and private groups from across Virginia and is the organization responsible for developing an annual HIV prevention plan for Virginia for submission to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information about this survey, the SRL, or the HCPC, contact: VCU Survey Research Laboratory, PO Box 3016, Richmond, VA 23284-3016. Our telephone is (804) 828-8813, and fax (804) 828-6133. Or visit the SRL on the World Wide Web at:

<http://www.vcu.edu/cppweb/srlweb/srlhome.htm>



**Figure 2: Percent giving the best responses to questions about prevention. Correct answers are given in parentheses.**



effective in stopping HIV. Eighty-three percent of whites, 66 percent of African-Americans and 58 percent of Hispanics correctly responded that withdrawal of the penis is not effective. The Hispanic sample was considerably more likely to respond with "don't know" and "don't know the method."

The table below shows the average number of correct responses to prevention and transmission questions for each of the three samples:

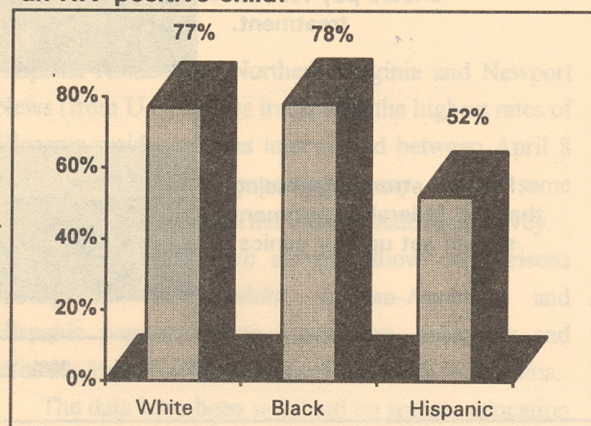
|   | White | AfrAm. | Hisp. |
|---|-------|--------|-------|
| <b>Transmission</b><br>(mean number correct out of 9) | 3.7   | 3.0    | 2.6   |
| <b>Prevention</b><br>(mean number correct out of 5)   | 2.6   | 2.3    | 2.0   |

#### HIV/AIDS and children

Sixty-four percent of Hispanic respondents said they have children under 21, as compared to less than half of the white and African-American samples. The Hispanic respondents' answers to questions about

HIV/AIDS and children also differed from the other groups' answers. For instance, as shown in Figure 3, just over three-quarters of the African-American and white samples said they would allow their children to attend school with HIV-positive children, as compared to about half of the Hispanic sample. Fewer Hispanics said they have talked to their children about HIV—42

**Figure 3: Percent saying that they would allow their children to be in a classroom with an HIV-positive child.**



percent compared to 51 percent of whites and 58 percent of African-Americans.

Finally, 75 percent of the African-American sample, 67 percent of the white sample, and 55 percent of the Hispanic sample felt that the earliest appropriate age for a parent to talk to his or her children about HIV is 10 years old or younger.

#### Responsibility for preventing and paying for HIV

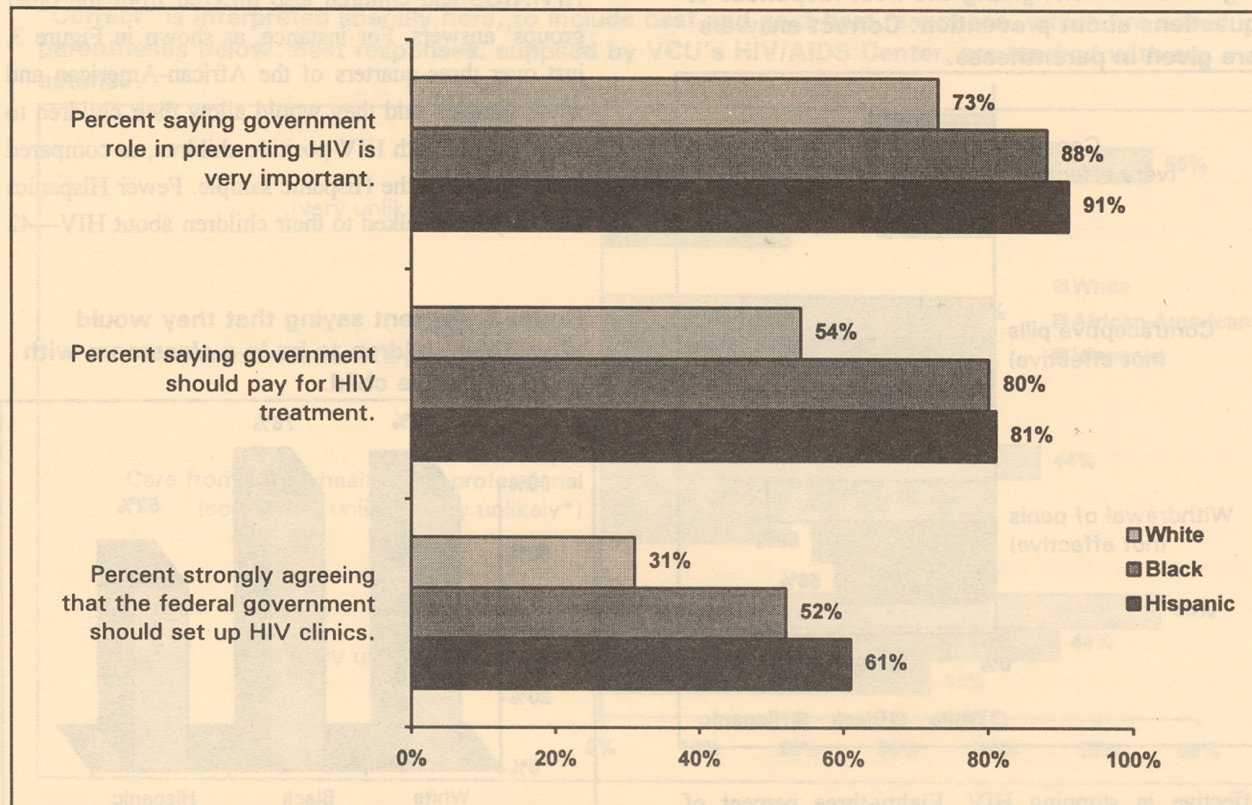
Strong majorities of Hispanic and African-American respondents endorsed a government role in preventing HIV and paying for the medical care of those with HIV. In contrast, white respondents showed less support for government involvement.<sup>2</sup>

As Figure 4 shows, ninety-one percent of the Hispanic sample and 88 percent of the African-American sample said government has a very

<sup>2</sup> The general population survey asked about the role of federal, state, and local government in separate questions. The figures given here for African-American and white samples are averages of responses for the three levels of government. The Hispanic sample was asked about government's role, without distinction among levels.



**Figure 4: Government role in HIV prevention and treatment.**



important role in HIV prevention, as compared to 73 percent of white respondents.

Eighty-one percent of Hispanic and 80 percent of African-American respondents said government should pay for medical care of those with HIV, as compared to 54 percent of white respondents. In addition, 86 percent of white respondents said individuals with HIV should pay for their own medical care, compared to 69 percent of African-Americans and only 46 percent of Hispanics.

Finally, 61 percent of Hispanic respondents, compared with 52 percent of African-Americans and only 31 percent of whites strongly agreed that the federal government should set up clinics to care for those with HIV.

#### **HIV/AIDS information and testing**

Hispanics in this comparison were much less likely to say they would go to a private physician for information about HIV or to have the HIV blood test than either whites or African-Americans. They were much more likely than either other group to say they

would go to an AIDS clinic or counseling site for the HIV test. African-Americans and Hispanics were more likely to say their health care provider has given them information about HIV.

#### **Conclusion**

The surveys indicate that whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics in Virginia differ in their knowledge and attitudes about HIV and AIDS. Overall, white respondents gave more correct responses in answer to questions about HIV transmission and prevention than did African-American and Hispanic respondents. In all three samples, however, those with more education and higher income tended to demonstrate more knowledge about HIV/AIDS than those with less education and lower income.

The surveys showed Virginia's African-Americans and Hispanics to be more supportive than whites of government action to prevent the spread of HIV and to care for those who have been infected with the virus.